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The Ground of the Testimony of Friends
against Removing the Hat. 1884

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THE
GROUND OF THE TESTIMONY
OF THE
RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS
AGAINST
REMOVING THE HAT
AND
USING COMPLIMENTARY FORMS OF SPEECH AS
TOKENS OF RESPECT.

PHILADELPHIA:
FRIENDS' BOOK STORE, 304 ARCH STREET.
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June 19, 1939

At a Meeting for Sufferings held in Philadelphia the 20th day of the Sixth Month, 1884.

- An Essay on the testimony of our Society against the use of those complimentary forms of speech and outward tokens of respect, out of which Friends were led in the beginning, [was produced.]

The Essay was united with, and the Book Committee was requested to attend to its publication, and to its distribution.

• Taken from the Minutes.

JOSEPH WALTON, *Clerk.*

Testimony against Hat Honor, &c.

SOME instances having recently occurred, in which members of our Society have been brought under trials in consequence of their faithful adherence to our ancient testimony against uncovering the head as a sign of honor to man, it seems right at this time to bring to view the ground on which our religious Society has ever based its refusal to comply with some of the complimentary forms of speech and outward tokens of respect which are commonly practised.

When George Fox and his fellow laborers were visited by the Spirit of Christ, and brought under earnest concern for their own salvation, and for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom among men, they were divinely taught to look unto that Spirit which had convinced them of sin, as that which would bring them into a state of purity and acceptance with God. William Penn says: "They were directed to the Light of Jesus Christ within, as the seed and leaven of the kingdom of God"—"the gift and grace of God to life and salvation, that appears to all"—"the only blessed means appointed of God to quicken, convince and sanctify man." This Light of Christ within, as God's gift for man's salvation, was "the root of the goodly tree of doctrines that grew and branched out of it;" and from this came also the various testimonies which they were led to exemplify in their behavior in the world. It was not

because the members of the church had convened and agreed among themselves so to do, that they refused to take up arms; that they obeyed Christ's command to "swear not at all;" and that they declined the use of flattering titles or vain compliments to man. It was because the Spirit of Christ led them out of these corrupt practices, that they became distinguished from other professors of religion by a more strict and self-denying manner of life. They experienced the truth of the Scripture declaration: "If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship one with another"—for they were led by this Divine Teacher into a remarkable uniformity in doctrine and practice.

George Fox says: "When the Lord sent me into the world, *He forbid* me to put off my hat to any, high or low; and I was required to say thee and thou to all men and women, without any respect to rich or poor, great or small." "Because I could not put off my hat to them, it set them all into a rage. But the Lord showed me that it was an honor from below, which He would lay in the dust and stain, an honor which proud flesh looked for, but sought not the honor which comes from God only. That it was an honor invented by men in the fall and alienation from God, who were offended if it was not given them; yet would they be looked upon as saints, church members, and great Christians; but Christ saith, 'How can ye believe, who receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?'"

So, William Penn, in the 9th chapter of *No Cross no Crown*, in setting forth the reasons which may be brought for declining the use of several worldly customs and fashions, mentions as the most important of all, this sense of Divine requiring. He says: "*The first and most pressing*

motive upon our spirits to decline the practice of these present customs of pulling off the hat, bowing the body or knee, and giving people gaudy titles and epithets in our salutations and addresses, was, that savor, sight and sense, that God by his light and spirit has given us of the Christian world's apostacy from God, and the cause and effects of that great and lamentable defection." "The brightness of his coming to our souls discovered, and the breath of his mouth destroyed every plant He had not planted in us. He was a swift witness against every evil thought, and every unfruitful work." "Every word, thought and deed was brought to judgment, the root examined, and its tendency considered." "The present honors and respect of the world among other things, became burdensome to us; we saw that they had no being in Paradise, that they grew in the night time, and came from an ill root; and that they only delighted a vain and ill mind, and that much pride and folly were in them."

In like manner, Robert Barclay, in the 15th proposition of his *Apology*, truly observes, "That God who is the Creator of man, and He to whom he oweth the dedication of both soul and body, is over all to be worshipped and adored, and that not only by the spirit, but also with the prostration of body. Now, kneeling, bowing and uncovering of the head is the alone outward signification of our adoration towards God, and therefore it is not lawful to give it unto man. He that kneeleth or prostrates himself to man, what doeth he more to God? He that boweth and uncovereth his head to the creature, what hath he reserved to the Creator? Now the Apostle shows us that the uncovering of the head is that which God requires of us in our worshipping of Him.—1 Cor., xi. 4. But if we make

our address to men in the same manner, where lieth the difference?"

After mentioning other weighty reasons, he states, near the conclusion of this subject, the strong ground on which he, and others of our early members stood, in refusing the homage of the hat and similar ceremonies. "This I can say boldly in the sight of God, from my own experience and that of many thousands more, that however small or foolish this may seem, yet we behaved to choose death rather than do it, and that *for conscience sake*; and that, in its being so contrary to our natural spirits, there are many of us to whom the forsaking of these bowings and ceremonies was as death itself; which we could never have left if we could have enjoyed our peace with God in the use of them."

Thomas Ellwood gives a very lively and instructive narration of the spiritual exercises through which he passed, after he was brought under conviction by the work of Grace, and was enabled in good measure to submit to its purifying operations. The practice of taking off the hat as a sign of honor to man, he was required of the Lord to forsake; and his faithfulness in this respect brought much suffering upon him. Similar experiences are recorded in the Journals of many of those who have been useful instruments in the Lord's hand.

Though the withholding of these outward tokens of honor would seem to be no reason why sensible men should take offence, yet there were few things which gave more irritation to others, or caused more suffering to our early Friends. "Oh! the blows, punchings, beatings and imprisonments that we underwent," says George Fox, "for not putting off our hats to men." "Some had their hats violently plucked off and thrown away, so that they quite

lost them. The bad language and evil usage we received on this account is hard to be expressed, besides the danger we were sometimes in of losing our lives for this matter."

But as the Society of Friends gained the esteem and respect of the community by the godly lives of its members, and by their patient endurance of suffering and outrage, and as it was found that they were not wanting in true respect for others, as manifested in a sincere and Christian behavior; the reasonableness of their objections to servile ceremonies became so far recognized by the communities in which they lived, that suffering and persecution on this account gradually passed away.

The period of ease, liberty, and outward prosperity through which we have since passed, has had a tendency to render some of our members less watchful against that conformity to the spirit of the world, which the Apostle exhorted the believers to avoid. Hence there is a danger of customs creeping in amongst us which are inconsistent with our profession.

We feel concerned, therefore, to caution our members at this day, to avoid complying with the customs of the world in using forms of expression, modes of salutation, and signs of respect, which conflict with the Scripture caution, "How can ye believe which receive honor one of another?" whose tendency is to cultivate a feeling of pride in those who receive them; and which are not the *sincere* expression of the feelings of those who use them. If a member of our Society falls into the practice of lifting his hat as a sign of respect to the casual acquaintances with whom he meets, how can he consistently refuse a similar homage when brought into the presence of judges or magistrates, whose official position he is bound to respect? And if these officers become accustomed to receive such

honors from those whom they know to be members of our Society, how will they be able to understand and properly respect the conscientious convictions of those consistent Friends who feel restrained from such compliance with ordinary usage? Thus the unfaithfulness of some will add to the burthens of the honest-hearted; and we will be in danger of losing those privileges which were gained through much suffering by our predecessors in religious profession.

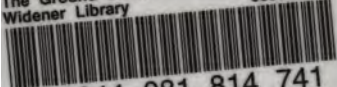
While thus concerned to advise our members, we are well aware that the maintenance of this and similar testimonies does not depend upon conviction of the understanding so much as on the subjection of the will to the power of Christ operating in the heart and bringing the whole man into a holy conformity with the Divine will. When the day of the Lord that burns as an oven comes upon our members, and they are made willing to bow unreservedly before Him, and to part with everything for the sake of the peace of God which passeth all understanding, then, we believe, they will willingly conform to this and all other testimonies against the *vain* customs of the world—their root will be discovered by the holy Light to be evil—and as many as come to walk by this light or rule will mind the same things; and peace will be on all such as the reward of faithful obedience to the Holy Leader of his people.

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